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Marouf Cabi, *The Formation of Modern Kurdish Society in Iran: Modernity, Modernization and Social Change 1921-1979*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2022, VI+217 pp., ISBN: 9780755642243.

Reviewed by Shahrzad Mojab, University of Toronto, Canada<sup>1</sup>

*Modernity* and *Modernization* are two central analytical themes in the study of contemporary Iran. They are employed to describe a range of social and political transformations in between two momentous revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 and the 1979 Revolution. Though there is some consensus on the social and political transformational power of the *modernity* and *modernization* projects, their impacts and robustness are nevertheless contested. The Constitutional Revolution delineated Iran's modern national identity, though it remained unfinished, especially in the separation of state and religion; in guaranteeing the full citizenship rights; in ending the despotic monarchical rule, and in promoting a mode of secular and rational thinking and governance. Nonetheless, it is agreed that even its incomplete success eased the process of *modernization* in the early Pahlavi era (1921-1941) as a centralized state plan to reform penal and civil codes, education, health, social welfare, military, and to expand urbanization, railroad system, and other infrastructural developments. Urban and middle-class women became one of the largest beneficiaries of such broad reforms. Reza Shah, the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty, forcefully banned the veil in 1936 and three decades later, in 1963, women gained the right to vote as part of the second Pahlavi Monarch's (1941-1979) massive social and economic *modernization* reform called the White Revolution. In this context, it is judicious to conclude that Iran has experienced a fragmentary *modernity* and *modernization* where neither its *modernity* was fully supplemented by *modernization*, nor its *modernization* embodied philosophical, political, and cultural thought and praxis of *modernity*.

*The Formation of Modern Kurdish Society in Iran: Modernity, Modernization and Social Change 1921-1979* is analytically and historically situated in this context and presents us with a set of new arguments through the experience of Kurdish society. The key argument is the 'dual process' characteristic of socio-economic *integration* of Kurdish society into modern Iran and the process of cultural and political *resistance* of the Kurds to the homogenizing modernization plan. Cabi contends that understanding this duality will help us avoid the ubiquitous adversarial approach of the Kurds to the modernization policy and suggests instead that "we need to look at the dialectics of the dual process, because the Kurdish society of the second half of the century is effectively a synthesis of the multifaceted process" (p. 168). In this articulation, Cabi critiques the Iranian state's nationalist, integrationist and centralized plan as well as the Kurdish nationalism that has overlooked the impact of modernization on the

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<sup>1</sup> Email: shahrzad.mojab@utoronto.ca.



social, cultural, and economic life of the Kurds. He argues that the “political landscape of the Kurdish region was profoundly altered in the decades following the Constitutional Revolution” (p. 18). However, he adds, it was during the reign of Reza Shah that Kurdish “tribes’ military and political power declined as the result of a centralizing and modernizing state’s oppressive policies, as well as socio-economic transformation” (p. 22). He shows that the shift in power did not result in change in the class composition of feudal Kurdish society and that most peasants remained under the oppressive rule of the *aghbas* and *sheikhs* (landlords and religious leaders). Cabi argues a more substantial social and economic change ensued as a result of the large-scale modernization plan of the White Revolution in the 1960s.

Cabi advances several important arguments on the paradoxical consequences of the forced state modernization of Kurdish society. First, in this process the Kurdish region of Iran was separated from “other Kurdish communities in adjacent regions” (p. 22). Second, this process invented Kurds as ‘ethnic minority’ or *aqaliat-e qaumi* which justifies “the Kurds’ marginalized position in the modern nation state of Iran, as well as political suppression and militarization” (p. 167). These paradoxical tendencies were expressed in “autonomy *within the framework of Iran* and not *independence* in different historical conjuncture, and the intensified social change during the era of the White Revolution...” (p. 22, emphasis in original). They were also manifested in the inseparability of political and cultural demands of the Kurds, that is *Kurdayetî*, from the state integration policy; a characteristic that Cabi articulates as a “paradox of socially integrating but ethnically resisting” (p. 23). He contends that *Kurdayetî* is not a “fixed term”, rather it is a “politico-cultural stance and a practice” (p. 23) that continued “to reshape according to historical conjunctures and intellectual transformations in the second half of the century” (p. 52).

Drawing from critical theories of “social change and transformation” and “nation and nationalism” (p. 4), Cabi takes a critical approach to Kurdish and Iranian national narratives, to modernization theories and to Orientalism. He tries to go beyond the prevalent historical and anthropological approaches to the study of Kurds and uses a critical “multidimensional approach” to read through the lives of the Kurds as embodied actors/subjects of history and society. The book is a welcome departure from the Iranian nationalist social historiography where the experience of national minorities in encountering the dominant culture and often suppressive and uneven nation-state building is erased and/or rendered irrelevant. The image on the cover, of Nahid Primary School in Saqqez in 1973, could represent any primary girls’ school anywhere in Iran. It is a rare image to depict the experience of public schooling and urbanization of the Kurds in Iran. The empirical evidence presented throughout the book explains the social and political meaning of the image.

The strength of the book stands in its attempt to use the political economy analysis of the Kurdish society, in particular during the less-studied historical period of 1940s-1979.<sup>1</sup> This analysis is partially used to discuss the rise of capitalism in the 1960s in Iran, the shift in class structure of Kurdish society, and the formation of a new group of radical intellectuals who paved the path for the emergence of the left movement in the revolutionary years of the 1970s. Cabi recognizes the limits of the explanatory power of some theoretical paradigms such as development and modernization theories or the discourse of nation and nationalism. However, he fails to develop and maintain a political economy framework that is informed

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<sup>1</sup> Abbas Vali covers mostly a political analysis of this period in *The Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran* (Cham: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2020).

by a Marxian historical materialist analysis to support the empirical evidence that he has carefully crafted to explore the dual process of *integration* and *resistance* of the Kurdish society.

Cabi argues that *The Formation of Modern Kurdish Society* is a product of the modernization process, in particular, through the White Revolution since the 1960s which initiated a massive nation-wide industrial and infrastructural development, land reform, the implementation of a planned economy, expansion of educational and health sectors, urbanization, and institution building. Three chapters (3, 4, and 5) are dedicated to analyzing the White Revolution as it coerces through Kurdish society. The empirical evidence in these chapters is valuable and they leave readers with clues for further in-depth class analysis of contemporary Kurdish society. Chapter 3 covers the “The Social Consequences of Modernization” focusing on land reform, that is the large migration of peasants to “unbridled” (p. 76) urban areas, where the unskilled Kurdish wage labourers settled in the booming construction projects in major urban areas throughout Iran. Urbanization and modernization increased child labour (mostly young boys) and the migration of seasonal workers left women as the head of the household under the rapidly deteriorating village life. Displaced peasants were forced to work under exploitative economic conditions and faced oppressive cultural conditions (mainly their unfamiliarity with Persian language). Public schooling, healthcare, and a limited social welfare program expanded in the growing urban centres in the Kurdish region. The White Revolution programs transformed the class structure of Kurdish society. A new urbanized, educated, middle-class emerged who benefitted from the modernization plan while their political and cultural awareness made them conscious of the regional economic disparity and the underprivileged condition of life which lasted until the 1979 Revolution. This heightened political consciousness was a continuation of the era of 1946-68 that Cabi considers “the formative years of the Kurdish modern opposition” (p. 105) and is covered in Chapter 4, “The Political and Cultural Consequences of Modernization.”

Chapter 4 is a departure from the dominant historiography of the rise and fall of the 1946 Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad. Cabi queries the “consequences” of the political suppression of the Kurds in the 1940-1970s in their “collective memory”. Through the memoirs of political leaders and interviews with activists and intellectuals, he sketches a brief regional and transnational history of these years, from the political split in Iraqi Kurdistan, to the rise of armed struggles in Iran and globally, and the growing influence of Marxism, socialism, and communism--in particular in response to the US imperialist aggression in Vietnam. A brief section is dedicated to the 1968-79 “intellectual transformation” (pp. 109-111) and the formation of student groups, mostly Marxist intellectuals at Tehran and Tabriz universities. Amir Hassanpour’s writing on the influence of Amir-Hossein Aryanpour, a prominent Marxist sociologist, on Kurdish students’ organizing is important, but not included in the analysis.<sup>1</sup> The activism of the Kurdish students in the two major universities of Tehran and Tabriz and later, their expansion in Europe and the creation of the Association of the Kurdish Students Aboard (AKSO) implores further studies. In Cabi’s book, we can find traces of these development but they need to be further explored. The chapter also discusses the ‘cultural’ consequences of the modernization project in the realms of language, theatre,

<sup>1</sup> Amir Hassanpour, “AH Aryanpour and Teaching Marxist Sociology during the 1960s”, *Iran Nameh*, 30/1 (Spring 2015): 1-56 (in Persian) [آ.ح اربانپور و تدریس جامعه شناسی مارکسیستی در دهه ۱۳۴۰]; Amir Hassanpour, *Aryanpour and Marxist Sociology: History, Class, and Dialectic*. Toronto, University of Toronto: Iran Namag Books (in Persian) [آریان پور و جامعه شناسی مارکسیستی: تاریخ، طبقه، اجتماعی و دیالکتیک].

cinema, music, secularization, all of which were profoundly influenced by the Persian cultural hegemony.

Chapter 5 focuses on the “Modernization of Gender Relations.” What is notable in this book is the integration of gender analysis throughout, though Chapter 5 centres on the impact of the centralized modernization policy on Kurdish women. Cabi contends that his analysis “deliberately stresses the *modernization of gender order* against the notion of the *emancipation of women* to maintain a critical approach towards development theories that perceive women as a category for ‘secularisation’, regarded as a prerequisite to becoming ‘modern’” (p. 3, emphasis in original). The chapter also provides a critique of the Kurdish national narrative, which promotes the notion of women as a *national asset* (p. 3). Women’s presence in public life is taken as the sign of the creation of a ‘new Kurdish woman.’ Kurdish women joined the nation-wide increase in mostly ‘feminized’ occupations such as teachers, nurses, civil servants, and later, lawyers and doctors. The modernization ethos of the White Revolution deeply changed the dynamic of gender relations and family structure in Iran, though it failed to profoundly alter patriarchal relations. To comprehend the complex gender impact of this process within Kurdish society, a Marxist feminist analysis is required to explicate the ways *capitalist patriarchal modernization* subsumed the remnants of feudal patriarchal relations and masculine nationalism to create the ‘women of the nation’ and attempted to ‘culturalize’ their struggle within the discourse of nationalism. Those women teachers, students, nurses, and doctors mostly broke away from these relations and joined the Kurdish and non-Kurdish radical and left movements during the revolutionary years of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The struggle of Kurdish women in this moment of history is yet to be fully written.<sup>1</sup> This experience is still vivid in the memories of that generation, and some participants are writing their memoirs, valuable sources for gleaning details in all aspects of life and struggle in Kurdish society.

The book offers an extensive literature review and covers a range of key theoretical debates on modernization and modernity in Iran, on nationalism and struggle for social justice, on the limits of modernity when it involves culture, education, language, politics, diversity, identity, and ethnicity. Through unique tables, figures, and photos, the study depicts the nature of uneven modernity and development. It takes us over the social history of Kurdistan through the rise of *modernity* and *modernization* in Iran. Thus, it is a reflection and a critique of Iranian nationalism and (often violent) state-centralized modernization policies. The Kurdish actors, such as women, intellectuals, landlord, peasants, workers, migrant and seasonal workers, bourgeoisie and trades people appear in different historical conjunctures. A much-understudied experience of urbanization, the transformation of village life, and the creation of the Kurdish migrant workers in Iran is detailed. Thus, it would seem salient to wonder why the Kurds, their land, politics, history, and culture, have not been considered as a place of theorization. Cabi, like most scholars of Kurdish society, does not break away from the application of a melange of grand theorizations or an eclectic theoretical approach. His theories take him through Iran to reach Kurdistan mainly because he struggles with a Marxian materialist dialectical analysis of capitalist social relations, both in Iran and Kurdistan. Surely, the Kurdish encounter with *modernity* and *modernization* cannot be disarticulated from the

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<sup>1</sup> One exception is the study by Fatemeh Karimi, *Genre et militantisme au Kurdistan d’Iran*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2022. It is based on her doctoral thesis; see Fatemeh Karimi, “Les rapports sociaux de sexe dans les forces politiques kurdes en Iran entre 1979 et 1991 : le Komala”, EHESS (Paris), 2020. See also Fatemeh Karimi, “Les militantes kurdes du Komala. De l’espace domestique à la lutte armée: motivations et obstacles”, *Les cahiers du CEDREF* n° 24 (2020): 45-67.

historical, social, and cultural conditions and relations in which it took place, but the experiences should be the ground to explore the explanatory power of theoretical frameworks and help us (re)articulate and deepen the theories which were used to frame the study to begin with. The study of Kurdish society, culture, and history requires a robust critical political economy approach. Cabi refers to the rise of capitalism and its impact on the class structure of Kurdish society, but his analysis is partial and falls short of integrating the demise of feudalism, the rise of capitalism, the imperialist rivalries in creating a sphere of influence in the region, and the emergence of new forms of class struggle in Kurdish society.<sup>1</sup> The book utilizes diverse sources of archival materials, oral history, memoirs, literary works, folktales and photos to guide the readers through Kurdistan as it was transformed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the persistence of resistance until today. The book is an important contribution to the expanding academic literature on the Kurdish region in Iran, which in comparison to other Kurdish regions remains relatively limited in the English language. Cabi has left us with traces of concrete ideas and evidences that can be further developed to theoretically and empirically enhance the study of the Kurds and Kurdish society in Iran.

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<sup>1</sup> For a critique of the historiography of the peasant movement see Amir Hassanpour, "The Absence of Peasant Revolts in the Middle East: A Historiographic Myth," in Amir Hassanpour, *Essays on Kurds Historiography, Orality, and Nationalism*. New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publisher, 2020, pp. 39-70. For an excellent and thorough study of the 1952-53 peasant uprising in the Mukriyan region see, *The Peasant Uprising of Mukriyan, 1952-1953*. Volume 1. Toronto, University of Toronto: Iran Namag Books, 2021 and *The Peasant Uprising of Mukriyan, 1952-1953: Consulate Documents, Diplomatic Correspondence and the Press Coverage*. Volume 2. Toronto, Asmana Publications 2022 (in Persian):

امیر حسن پور (۱۴۰۰). *شورش دهقانان مکریان ۱۳۳۱-۱۳۳۲* ش. جلد اول، انتشارات ایران نامگ، تورنتو، دانشگاه تورنتو] و امیر حسن پور (۱۴۰۲). *شورش دهقانان مکریان ۱۳۳۱-۱۳۳۲* ش: اسناد کنسولگری، مکاتبات دیپلماتیک و گزارش روزنامه ها. جلد دوم، تورنتو، انتشارات آسمانا.

Mari R. Rostami, *Kurdish Nationalism on Stage: Performance, Politics and Resistance in Iraq*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2019, 249 pp., ISBN: 9781788318693.

Reviewed by Michiel Leezenberg, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands<sup>1</sup>

In Kurdish studies, theatre has not exactly received the attention it deserves. Earlier discussions on the role of Kurdish culture in the development of nationalism, and on Kurdish – and other – cultural nationalism more generally, have tended to focus on poetry, and to assume that theatre has been a marginal factor in this process. Moreover, they generally focus on the contents of these works at the expense of questions concerning their performance, their intended audience, and so on. Thus, there has long been a disproportionate attention for the few chapters in the *dibaçe* or preamble of Ehmedê Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* that overtly discuss the author's innovative or heretic use of vernacular Kurdish for writing learned *mathnawî* poetry, and the plight of the Kurds under Ottoman and Persian rule.

Conversely, in drama studies, even works that deal with the Arab world have hardly if at all addressed the specific experience of Kurdish drama production in countries like Syria and Iraq. In recent decades, Arab theatre has increasingly, and deservedly, drawn the attention of drama scholars (witness, for example, Khalid Amine and Marvin Carlson's masterly 2011 study, *The Theatres of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia*); but the concomitant increase in interest in performance traditions among non-Arab ethnic groups in Northern Africa, like the Berbers in particular, has hardly been matched by an increased interest for Kurdish theatre in the Eastern Arab world.

For these reasons alone, the appearance of Mari Rostami's *Kurdish Nationalism on Stage: Performance, Politics, and Resistance in Iraq* is greatly to be welcomed. Rostami's study marks a major step forward in our knowledge of Kurdish theatre and its importance for the articulation and public assertion of Kurdish (national) aspirations. Her book is a revised version of a PhD dissertation defended at the University of Exeter in 2016, for which the current reviewer acted as an external examiner. Although she focuses on the cultural rather than the political expressions of Kurdish nationalism, Rostami argues that ultimately, "there was no divide between cultural and political nationalism in Iraqi Kurdistan- this was a reflection of the fact that the ultimate aim of theatre artists was an independent and free Kurdistan" (p. 217). Especially during the 1975-1991 period, she concludes, the performance of Kurdish theatre plays definitely contributed to the collective mobilization of resistance to the Baathist regime.

The book does not pretend to be a general historical overview of Kurdish theatre. It deals almost exclusively with Iraq, focusing on plays and performances in the Sorani dialect in the years between the establishment of a British mandate in 1919 to the emergence of de facto Kurdish self-rule in 1991. Thus, early efforts like Evdirrehîm Rehmî Hekarî's 1919 *Memê Alan* in Kurmancî – a play clearly indebted to Namık Kemal's *Vatan yabut Silistre* (1872) as much as to any French or Italian model – are discussed only in passing (p. 7-8); and Kurdish drama production in the Soviet Union and its successor states is not mentioned at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Email: m.m.leezenberg@uva.nl.

Plainly, much more work deserves to be done in these directions, the more so as it is very well possible that there are substantial points of comparison, if not direct influences, between Kurdish drama produced in the Soviet Union and in Baathist Iraq, given the decades-long political and cultural ties, and given the strong structural similarities, between both one-party states.

After an introductory chapter on traditional performance forms in Kurdistan (including an all-too brief discussion of the recently revived *dengbêj* tradition in Bakur), Rostami zooms in on the development of modern theatrical performance during the British mandate period and in monarchical Iraq. The main protagonist of this period is Pîremerd (Tawfiq Mahmud Hamza, 1867-1950), who pioneered the popularization not only of poetry, but also of theatrical performances, in Sorani. Although initially performed in front of the more affluent local notables, this Sorani theatre soon developed into an art form that could also appeal to, or was in fact intended to reach, the poorer and often illiterate masses. In 1935, Pîremerd staged his theatrical version of *Mem û Zîn*, in a deliberate attempt to get a Kurdish public interested in theatre based on their own stories and traditions. Thus, theatre soon proved an effective instrument not just for producing Kurdish nationalism, but also for addressing women's rights and promoting working-class consciousness.

Despite the importance of Pîremerd's and others' efforts, it was only after 1970 that Kurdish theatre started to flourish, in the newly declared autonomous Kurdistan region in Baathist Iraq – suggesting that here as elsewhere, the development of local theatrical traditions requires particular political preconditions. The two final chapters present a detailed discussion of the two most important authors and directors of Kurdish theatre of this period, Talat Saman and Ahmad Salar. The former, Rostami argues, primarily expressed socialist and modernist ideals in his plays and stagings, whereas the latter tried to develop a purely Kurdish nationalist theatre in the face of increasing Baathist violence. Thus, Saman's theatrical adaptation of *Mem û Zîn*, written in 1968 but first staged only in 1976, shortly after the collapse of the Kurdish insurgency, reflects a critique of feudalism and tribalism in Kurdish society as much as an assertion of Kurdish aspirations. Even more remarkable was Salar's 1987 staging of *Nalî û xewnêkî erxewanî* ('Nalî and a Violet Dream'), which depicts a mythical 'Kurdish Golden Age' under the autonomous Baban principality. Following Moroccan theorist Abdelkarim Berrechid's call for a 'ceremonial theatre' (*al-masrah al-ibtifali*), which searches for specifically Moroccan drama forms, Salar aimed at creating a form of theatre based on Kurdish traditions, characters, and instruments rather than Western models. Although not overtly addressing Baathist repression, Salar's plays were recognized as clearly dealing with the Kurdish plight in Iraq by both audiences and authorities, and – surprisingly perhaps – well received by Arab as well as Kurdish spectators.

With their plays, Rostami argues, both directors not only helped to mobilize resistance against the regime, but also helped to create a sense of Kurdish nationhood. According to Salar himself, theatre artists actually replaced the peshmerga as the most prominent advocates of Kurdish patriotism and resistance after the 1975 collapse of the armed Kurdish insurgency. The fact that both theatre artists courageously continued their 'Theatre of Resistance' even in the worst years of Baathist repression makes their work all the more remarkable and worthy of attention, not only in Kurdish studies but also for students of theatre in conflict zones more generally. Rostami also devotes a number of particularly fascinating pages – partly based on Zangana's earlier study (2002) – to the 'guerrilla theatre' of the later 1970s and 1980s,

which was performed clandestinely, and in part by Kurdish peshmerga fighters, in areas outside government control.

Apart from a few earlier studies on Kurdish theatre in Iraq, like those by Hasan Tanya (1985), Hawre Zangana (2002), and Ferhad Pirbal (2001), Rostami's book is the first major discussion of modern Kurdish theatre. Unlike these earlier works, it also devotes at least as much attention to the performance and to the conditions of production as to the textual content of the plays discussed. As such, it fills a huge gap in our knowledge, and at the same time raises new questions about periods, areas and dimensions not covered. For example, what exactly were the antecedents and inspirations of Kurdish drama in late Ottoman times? What forms of Kurdish theatre do we find in other regions and other dialects, and can we find any contacts, convergences and/or contrasts between them? Another set of questions revolves around the influence of Leninist party organization as a tool for both political domination and cultural production. In both Iraq and (post-) Soviet Armenia, for example, one would expect Kurdish drama to have been shaped by Soviet and Eastern German models – witness, for example, the enormous influence of Brecht's 'epic theatre' in the post-World War II Arab world at large. And finally, one would like to know in greater detail how theatre developed after the 1991 uprisings, and in the wake of the quickly developing local Kurdish television and transnational television channels.

These are but a few of the many topics one would hope to see addressed in more detail someday. It is but one of the many merits of Rostami's superb study that it triggers such and other questions. It is greatly to be hoped that research into this fascinating but sadly neglected aspect of Kurdish cultural life can be continued and expanded.

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Mari Toivanen, *The Kobane Generation: Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2021, 294 pp., ISBN: 9789523690431.

Reviewed by Chra Rasheed Mahmud, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK<sup>1</sup>

Throughout history, Kurds encountered various tragedies, starting with the division of Kurdish land or ‘Kurdistan’ by the imperial powers to the political alienation, discrimination, and genocide by the dominant nations, including the Arabs, Turkish, and Persians. Moreover, the persistent political insecurity in the region resulted in an influx of migrant waves toward the West and the world. In the last decade, and especially starting at the beginning of 2014, Kurds have faced quite a virulent and destructive threat by the Islamic State (ISIS), which utterly shattered the lives of tens of thousands of people. Consequently, the Kurdish political and cultural life in Iraq and Syria has been deeply impacted and, in some places, completely destroyed. At the time, Western allies supported the Kurdish troops in fighting against the Islamic State in the region, and Kurdish activists in the diaspora across many European countries also provided support. Ever since, voluminous books have been published on nationalism (Gunes, 2019; Vali, 2020), migration (Bocheńska, 2018), mobilisation (Schött, 2021; Zalme, 2020), and the Kurdish diaspora (Keles, 2015; Mahmud, 2016). *The Kobane Generation: Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France*, by Mari Toivanen, is one of these books.

*The Kobane Generation* is an interesting and well-written book that recognizes and addresses the experiences and real-life problems of second-generation Kurds in France. Throughout the book, Mari Toivanen explains a series of events that facilitated the formulation of Kurdish transnational participation in the diaspora. As a start, Toivanen highlights the role of the Kobane region in dispersing mobilisation in several Middle Eastern countries: Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. She also considers how the siege of Kobane put the Kurds more into the spotlight internationally, strengthened the bond between the Kurdish people in the diaspora and the region, and helped create a united Kurdish community in Europe. By combining unique empirical evidence and contemporary sociological theories of diaspora and transnationalism, the author addresses multiple themes and events concerning second-generation Kurdish migrants – the ‘Kobane generation’.

Overall, the book can be seen as a significant theoretical contribution to Kurdish diaspora studies, as it offers comprehensive literature and observation on the Kurdish diaspora, transnationalism, mobilisation, and second-generation Kurdish migrants in France and across many European countries. Besides, it contributes to our understanding of mobilisation and national identity formation in the periphery of the Kurdish diaspora by examining the small but well-established second-generation Kurdish community in France.

The book is divided into three main parts containing seven chapters in total. The first section, titled ‘background’, consists of two chapters. In the first chapter of the book, Toivanen introduces her motivation and aims for writing this book. Next, she provides insights into the recurring and principal key concepts and themes she uses. Further in the chapter, she explains the necessity of having a book that concentrates on the ‘diaspora’s transnational engagement with the focus on the second generation’s transnational participation from the perspective of diaspora contribution’ (p. 16). Then, in chapter 2, she discusses the recent historical events in

<sup>1</sup> E-mail: cm644@canterbury.ac.uk / chra.mahmud988@gmail.com.

Kurdistan and the diaspora, followed by an ‘overview of the related theoretical and empirical debates concerning diaspora mobilisation and transnational participation towards the ‘homeland’ (p. 19).

The book’s second part is about providing background and contextualising the Kurdish population’s underlying ‘geopolitical tensions and divisions’ in the Middle East and in the diaspora under the title ‘Here and There: Between Kurdistan and Europe’. Starting from the history of the Kurds, the historical division of Kurdish-inhabited regions, and the political consequences of being a stateless nation, Toivanen goes on to discuss the history of majority-minority affairs related to Kurds in three national contexts, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. She further confers the current political situation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, followed by an overview of the current situation in Kurdistan in the new millennium (p. 69). Finally, in chapter 4, she explains the intersection between individual life stories and major historical events and contextualises the Kurdish diasporic mobilisation in Paris in 2010.

The third part, titled ‘Mobilization and Participation towards Kurdistan’, is designed to present the empirical data and collected materials, including interviews with first- and second-generation diaspora members and non-diaspora activists, observations, and related online materials. The section is divided into three chapters – chapters 5, 6, and 7. Chapter 5 examines the ‘mobilization and transnational participation of Kurdish diaspora communities in France in 2010’. Toivanen explains how the ‘transformative events’ (e.g., the Kobane Siege and the assassination of three activists in Paris) have united the Kurdish communities across Europe and increased the ‘passive’ and ‘silent’ modes of mobilisation among diaspora members (p. 128). She further draws our attention to the impact of the political changes that shaped Kurdish national identity and the views of Western societies towards the Kurdish case.

In chapter 6, Toivanen extends her discussion to the second generation of Kurdish parentage. She critically addresses a series of questions: ‘How did a series of events shape mobilisations in Paris?’ ‘What repertoire of actions does the mobilisation entail?’ ‘What factors shaped the observed mobilisation?’ In the later part of the chapter, she debates the mobilisation in Paris in the context of political ambivalence towards the Kurdish question, namely concerning the criminalisation of certain Kurdish political parties, such as the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) in Europe generally and in France specifically.

In chapter 7, Toivanen explores how the second generation of Kurdish parentage perceived the battle of Kobane and the Paris assassinations and notes the importance of the Kobane siege for the second generation. Next, she pays attention to the differences between mobilisation experiences and transnational activities among first and second generations individuals and the outcome of mobilisation connected with global and diasporic activities and engagement between the two generations. Besides, she explains how second-generation participation in Kurdish-inhabited areas should be understood as a form of ethnonational participation or manifestation of diasporic belonging. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, Toivanen discusses the prominence of the Kobane siege and the Kurds’ combat against ISIS in the international media, the significance of Kobane in shaping and reshaping the national identity of the second generation, and the importance of understanding their ‘Kurdishness’. Likewise, she discusses the role of the online dimension in constructing the ‘homeland’.

Overall, this book is a compelling and much-needed reflection on the topics of transnationalism and second-generation migrants. It is an opportunity to explore the Kurds’

political issues and a wide range of topics around France's Kurdish diaspora and second-generation and transnational individuals. In other terms, the book can be used as a 'guide-post' or a 'map' for studying the Kurds in other parts of the world due to the presence of rich data.

Furthermore, the book provides essential reading for anybody looking for a comprehensive view of the Kurdish diaspora, mobilisation, transnationalism, and second-generation Kurds. It also contains a practical and theoretical framework for studying the Kurds as a diaspora and transnational community. To make the book even more interesting, the author employs multiple data collection methods and cohesively presents numerous examples with a flawless writing style. However, it would make all the qualitative case studies more conclusive if the author examined some quantitative data or equally drew on the quantitative method(s).

To sum up, as a linguist and an avid Ph.D. researcher working on a multidisciplinary topic on the Kurdish diaspora in the UK, I find this work to be seminal in the developing field of Kurdish studies. Moreover, the well-organised data chapters, and the main structure of the book from start to end, form a bridge that connects the relevant theories and practices with the contemporary and topical Kurdish question. For these reasons, I highly recommend it to everyone who desires to generate an understanding of the Kurds and the lived experiences of the Kurdish diaspora. This book should be particularly beneficial to university students at all levels and early career researchers who seek to understand diaspora, mobilisation, and transnationalisation in the Kurdish context.

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Michael Knights and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, *Accidental Allies: The U.S.—Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2022, 277 pp., ISBN: 9780755643066.

Reviewed by Michael M. Gunter, Tennessee Technological University, USA<sup>1</sup>

This book is not so much an analysis of U.S. support for the Syrian Kurds (although it is) or therefore U.S. opposition against its supposed NATO ally Turkey (although it is), but more how the U.S. used minimal support for the Syrian Kurds (particularly the YPG/YPJ and then its successor the SDF) to achieve maximum gains for itself against the Islamic State (IS/ISIS). This opening sentence already presents the reader with a barrage of acronyms, which fortunately is interpreted by a helpful list on opening pages xv-xvii. Thus, for the uninitiated, SDF refers to the Syrian Democratic Forces, the alliance between the Syrian Kurds (People's Defense Units or YPG and its sister Women's Protection Units or YPJ) and sympathetic Arabs, among others, successfully patched together in a largely unsuccessful attempt to satisfy Turkey that the SDF was not closely allied to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Kurdish organization considered a terrorist group by both Turkey and the U.S.

This review's befuddling opening paragraph also partially illustrates the legerdemain the U.S. successfully carried out, as described in this well written study based largely on interviews and on-sight observations as well as other academic books and articles. One wonders, however, why numerous other academic studies of these events went unmentioned by the authors. Likewise, the reference on at least two occasions (pp. 8 and 14) to the book as a mere "paper" speaks to the need for more careful editorial work. Throughout all this analysis, the authors provide useful, detailed maps and lists of figures.

The authors are particularly impressed with the U.S. military operational phrase "by, with, and through" (p. 1) to refer to "a partner force . . . to operations [that] are led *by* our partners, state or nonstate, *with* enabling support from the United States or U.S.-led coalitions, and *through* U.S. authorities and partner agreements" (p. 1). They return to this phrase repeatedly and even use it as part of the title of their last two of seven total chapters. However, to quibble, this reviewer was not as impressed with the insights this "uniquely tailored" phrase (p. 1) supposedly gave. More enlightening perhaps is the further explanation that the phrase "involves attaining a degree of control over a partner force . . . but with reduced risks and costs to the United States, and with lessened U.S. responsibilities in the aftermath of the conflict" (p. 1) or what is also "characterized as a fascinating quest for influence without authority" (p. 1).

The two authors do make the excellent point that the U.S. "effort in northeast Syria succeeded as an economy-of-force effort that marked a clear contrast to the costly commitments in Afghanistan since 2001 and in Iraq in 2003-11" (p. 9). Not only did the U.S. spend a mere fraction of the money and commit a much smaller contingent of its troops, but "over a fifty-four-month period, [only] seven U.S. combatants were killed in action" (p. 9). Moreover, in the summer of 2021, the entire Afghanistan mission proved a dismal failure, while the final outcome of the continuing Iraqi venture remains very problematic. Of course, one must also

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<sup>1</sup> Email: mgunter@tntech.edu.

admit that the situation in northeast Syria stands as a continuing process yet to reach its final denouement.

Chapter 1 reviews the SDF's basic components. The authors note that "the military expertise used to develop a Syrian Kurdish self-defense force was mostly drawn from PKK veterans from the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 24). They explain how "this PKK-based grassroots network was particularly strong in the more Ocalanist (a rather awkward neologism coined by the authors to refer to Abdullah (Apo) Ocalan, founder of the PKK in 1978, and imprisoned in Turkey since 1999) communities in Afrin and Kobane, which were connected through familial and tribal links to Kurdish communities across the border in southeast Turkey" (p. 25). Knights and van Wilgenburg further detail that Mazloum Kobani Abdi, the "commander of the SDF . . . was the recently returned Syrian PKK member" (p. 27) and that his force included "men and women operating in mixed-gender units, which are very atypical of the Middle East, but standard practice in the PKK" (p. 27). (Interestingly, "Mazloum . . . was also being actively courted by Iranian intelligence officers at the time" (p. 37), but clearly chose to throw in his lot with the Americans.) Further, "a number of senior leaders of the YPG were drawn from the PKK cadres. . . . The PKK veterans also shaped the YPG's military culture" (p. 33). "Also inherited from the PKK was a focus on discipline, which was mentioned prominently by almost every YPG and non-YPG interviewee" (p. 34). "Key members of the founding cadre of the YPG had been trained in the PKK and had fought Turkey under it" (p. 39). "The ultimate goal of the YPG was to establish a contiguous [Kurdish] territory on the Syrian-Turkish border, spanning from Afrin to Iraq" (p. 29). No wonder Turkey forcibly objected!

The authors then explain that the "episode, in which PKK veterans helped to defend Sinjar [and its surrounded Yazidis] at a time when most other potential allies were in disarray, left the U.S. government impressed and intrigued" (p. 36). The resulting "vetting was minimal because of the urgency of the matter and the [U.S.] desire to be working with [the YPG]" (p. 38). This was in stark contrast to earlier, failed U.S. attempts to find allies on the ground. For example, "in mid-September [2015] U.S. military leadership admitted to Congress that the \$500 million effort to train Syrian forces against the Islamic State had resulted in just 'four or five' individual fighters being deployed to the battlefield" (p. 82). The YPG was "the only fighting force in the counter-IS war to deliver battlefield victories" (p. 82). "The program with the SDF rose out of the ashes of the failed-train-and-equip effort with Turkey. This was much thriftier. By design, we didn't go big" (p. 85). Thus, "it was . . . accepted that supporting the YPG . . . would anger Turkey" (p. 39). The authors also dismiss allegations that the SDF/YPG was guilty of ethnic cleansing of Arabs.

With this background, the authors move on in Chapter 2 to analyze the epic "Stalingrad-type fighting" (p. 67) in Kobane on the Turkish border that began in mid-September 2014. "The siege of Kobane marked the first real battlefield defeat for the Islamic State. . . . The Kurds had seen what American airpower could do, and the United States had witnessed the Kurds hang on while they defended other frontlines" (p. 67). Although the Kurds lost more than a thousand fighters, "Kobane raised the morale of all forces fighting the Islamic State" (p. 67). From Kobane, the YPG, with its not so subtle U.S. support, moved on to the border town of Tal Abyad (Girê Spî in Kurdish) to "quickly shut down an important foreign fighter entry point to the Syria-Iraq theater—something that Turkey, a NATO ally, had refused to do, despite repeated entreaties from the United States" (p. 75).

Chapter 3 narrates how the U.S. continued to bolster the development of the SDF and support its capture of the Manbij area west of the Euphrates River, action which quickly offended Turkey and eventually resulted in its military intervention first in Afrin to the west in January 2018 and maybe even more notoriously to the east between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn (Serêkaniyê) in October 2019 when U.S. president Donald J. Trump suddenly withdrew most of his few supporting troops. The Turkish intervention led to widespread condemnation in the United States that the U.S. had dishonorably deserted its Syrian Kurdish ally.

Chapter 4 goes on to assess the SDF campaign to expel IS from Raqqa, one of its so-called capitals in Syria, the other being Mosul in Iraq. The authors scrutinize the accelerating U.S. aid as well as the resulting escalation of tensions with Turkey. Chapter 5 then considers the complex and slower operations to seize further IS-held territory in the Deir al-Zour province and the inherent difficulties entailed in operating in a largely Arab province. Chapter 6 furthers this scrutiny to the post-conflict stabilization challenges caused by the Turkish incursions in 2018 and 2019 already mentioned above.

The final, seventh chapter reviews the main questions, controversies, and findings of this U.S. campaign in northeastern Syria to use the Syrian Kurds to bring down IS with minimal cost to the U.S. Despite accusations this U.S. partnership with the SDF/YPG “cost the United States a great deal in terms of weakening ties to a longstanding NATO ally, Turkey” (p. 10), “the formula of drip-feeding perishable U.S. intelligence and firepower was, in fact, extremely effective at limiting the risk of overdeveloping the YPG and SDF partner force in a way that could threaten Turkey” (p. 17). Although “such high-quality partner forces are rare” (p. 17), the authors find a few other possible analogies with how the U.S. engaged the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and some Iraqi Kurdish forces. In addition, they argue that “Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have arguably developed Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen’s Houthis in a similar manner” (p. 17).

In a period when U.S. foreign policy successes seem few, this timely analysis of its successful partnership with the SDF/YPG is welcomed. This book will prove useful to civilian and military policy practitioners, academics, and the interested lay public.